

REPORT

ON THE

PRACTICABILITY AND NECESSITY

OF A

HOUSE OF REFUGE

FOR

COLOURED JUVENILE DELINQUENTS

IN


PHILADELPHIA.

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PHILADELPHIA:

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1841.

 The following report was made to the Board of Managers of the House of Refuge, March 2, 1841 : and,—for the purpose of affording to the citizens an opportunity to judge of the facts and views it contains—it was laid on the table and one thousand copies ordered to be printed and distributed under the direction of the committee.

The COMMITTEE to whom was referred the subject of providing accommodations for such Coloured Children as may be considered proper subjects of the care of the House of Refuge, submit the following

## R E P O R T :

At the time our Institution was established it was regarded by many very much in the light of an experiment. Prejudices were to be overcome. Necessity or propriety suggested modifications, from time to time, of our rules of admission, government, and discipline. Difficulties in providing proper trades and combining instruction with manual labour were anticipated and have often occurred. In these circumstances it would have been unwise to attempt too much at once. Many things, that might be practicable with enlarged means and under a more extended plan of operations, were therefore left for future consideration.

The law establishing the House of Refuge contemplates no difference of colour as distinguishing the classes which shall be admitted. It offers a shelter and a friendly, guiding hand to *all* who are the proper subjects of its guardianship. It is not singular in this respect. There are other public



Institutions provided for the neglected and destitute, as well as for those who are suspected or convicted of crime, let their colour be what it may.

Sometimes the Courts of the Country have sent coloured children to our care, but having no suitable separate accommodations for them, we have improved the earliest opportunity to provide for them elsewhere; and the knowledge of the community, that we were not prepared to receive them, has doubtless prevented applications. In the New York House of Refuge coloured children have always been received, and have constituted about one-fifth of their admissions.

It seems unnecessary to produce evidence or use arguments to show that some provision should be made for the vicious and neglected children of coloured families. Their opportunities for improvement in morals or useful learning of any kind, we know to be extremely limited. Many of the motives, which are relied upon to stimulate other classes of children to industry and exertion, are unknown to them. They have all the depraved dispositions which characterise our fallen nature, and these dispositions are nourished and strengthened by many circumstances peculiar to their situation. It would not be difficult to show, (were this the time and place and were apologies for sin ever admissible,) that there are many apologies for parental neglect and filial disobedience, and general corruption and

reckless among the coloured class of our population, which other classes of the poor cannot plead. There is an abjectness in the poverty they suffer—there is a wretchedness in their homeless, hapless destitution;—and in the habits and associations of the lowest grades there is an assimilation to the irrational animals,—which, if seen among whites, would excite universal commiseration.

These circumstances do not at all weaken our obligation, or abate the necessity which lies upon us to provide for their improvement;—for bettering their moral condition; for correcting the evils to which we are exposed by reason of their ignorance and vicious habits; and for protecting ourselves, as a community, against their criminal acts, examples and influences. Every argument, that can be urged for the seasonable check of a white child's vicious career, will apply with increased force to the case of a coloured child; inasmuch as the latter, from the peculiarity of his circumstances, is exposed to more temptations with fewer restraints.—It costs as much to support a coloured pauper as a white one; a coloured thief, or robber, or burglar, is as malevolent and unwelcome as a white one, and it is as expensive to arrest, convict and punish the former, as the latter.

The coloured population of Philadelphia city is 10,366, and of the county 13,183, making a total of 23,549.—Of these 3,337 are supposed to be between



five and fifteen years of age, and of this number a large portion are neither at schools nor trades.

It is to be presumed that among so great a number of poor, idle, ignorant children there are many who need the care and discipline, and reforming influence of such an Institution as the House of Refuge.

The coloured population of New York by the last census is 50,261 and that of Pennsylvania 50,571, being a difference of only 310.

We find that of 185 children received into the New York House of Refuge in a year, 45 were coloured, viz: 24 boys and 21 girls, and that of these forty-five, five only were from the country. The average number of coloured inmates for the last four years, (1836-1840) is 39. The present year it is only 37. By a comparison of the juvenile population of the two cities, (supposing the laws and the efficiency of the committing authority to be the same) we may form some opinion of the provision we need to make, at least with sufficient accuracy for practical purposes.

The whole number of coloured children in the city of New York between five and fifteen is 2,430, the whole number in Philadelphia is 3,337. If then the juvenile coloured population of New York furnishes 39 inmates per annum, or one in 62, that of Philadelphia may be expected to furnish an equal ratio, which would be 53.

The unnecessary multiplicity of institutions of this

character is to be avoided. The expense of buildings, furniture, supervision, &c., should be divided upon the largest number practicable. Improvements in discipline, instruction and general management are likely to be sought for much more eagerly when the good to be done is extensive and the means limited, than when little is to be done with abundant means—for necessity is the mother of invention.

We have been asked by some of our fellow-citizens if we cannot make provision for the wants of coloured children either by appropriating some part of the premises now in use to that purpose, or by the erection of a suitable building within or near the present enclosure, of the advantages of which they may thus partake without interfering with the existing regulations of the institution.

This is not the first time the attention of the Board has been called to the subject. As early as the autumn of 1829 (the year after our Refuge was opened) it was proposed to erect buildings with suitable dormitories and work-shops, &c., for the accommodation of coloured children. But the proposition was not sustained, though lost by a majority of only two out of fourteen votes. Various considerations weighed with the Board at that time which would not now be urged, and reasons for adopting such a measure have gained strength, and many new arguments for it, connected with the increase of crime and ignorance, are at hand. A few of them only need be stated.



The criminal statistics of Pennsylvania show a very large and fearfully increasing proportion of coloured convicts, and it is said to be the most extensive and hopeless class we have to sustain.

The number of prisoners in Moyamensing prison tried and untried, a few days since, was 411. Of the convicts, 79 were white, and 99 were coloured—of the untried 79 are white males, 70 coloured males; 42 are white females, and 42 coloured females. Of the whole number, 200 are white, and 211 coloured.

The whole number in the Eastern Penitentiary on the first of January last was 376, of whom 160 were coloured.

The whole number in the Eastern Penitentiary on the first of January 1831, was 54, of whom 16 were coloured, shewing that of every nine convicts in 1831 4 were coloured, and that of every nine convicts in 1841, 7 were coloured! If the proportion of city population were maintained, there would be but one coloured convict to every 10 white convicts.\*

The whole number of convicts received at the the Eastern Penitentiary since it was opened, (October 25, 1829,) is 1,354. The proportion of coloured

\* To show the same disproportion in a still more striking light: if we had in the Eastern Penitentiary as many white convicts in proportion to the white population of the State as we have of coloured convicts in proportion to the coloured population of the State, the number of the former would be increased from 216 to 5375, and the same rule would swell the white inmates of Moyamensing from 200 to 7089!



of both sexes is as 5 coloured to 8 whites, but the coloured female convicts are double the number of white female convicts.

It is somewhat singular that so much more favourable results should be derived from the statistics of pauperism than from the statistics of crime. But so it is. On the 30th of December, 1830, the Philadelphia Almshouse contained 1,237 inmates of whom 132 were blacks, shewing a proportion of a little more than 1 coloured person to 7 whites,—and the proportion was within a fraction the same on the 23d of January 1841. It seems to confirm the opinion often expressed, that the criminal law is administered much more rigidly upon one class than the other, and hence a powerful argument for some suitable and efficient preventive system applicable to coloured juvenile delinquents.

No one can fail to see that causes of no ordinary power must have produced a disproportion so unfavourable to the coloured people—and it is a question of some interest how far the House of Refuge may have contributed to make the striking difference between the respective classes. It is perfectly obvious that of the hundreds who pass through our hands a very large proportion may be considered as arrested in a career of wretchedness and crime, and introduced to habits and duties which may prepare them for honest and useful lives; and many of those in whom we fail to see this happy change, are so far enlightened and warned that they never run into

that excess of crime into which their previous habits and associations were hurrying them. How few appreciate the advantages of the Refuge to the State in thus cutting down and rooting out the young shoots of licentiousness and crime, we need not say. The simple alternative presented to the government is, whether it will countenance and aid a measure which promises, by seasonable interposition, to remove the coloured delinquent from the haunts of iniquity and from the influence of temptation and evil example, and put him under restraint and discipline; or whether his criminal propensities and habits shall grow with his growth and strengthen with his strength, till he becomes a confirmed offender, the common enemy of society and the almost hopeless subject of expensive prison discipline.— Every principle of economy, humanity, and self-protection, must urge us to the preventive process.\*

Under these circumstances the question is submitted to us, whether we can afford the desired accommodations, and in what form, and to what extent they shall be furnished. In determining this question we are to guard against any measure that shall prejudice the character, abridge the usefulness, or put in jeopardy the objects for which the House of Refuge was founded. If by an attempt to extend the benefits of the institution to a distinct class of children we

\* The frequent reference to this subject made by Courts and Juries would of itself furnish some evidence of the importance of the proposed measure and its bearings upon the interests of the community.



hazard its existing usefulness, we shall all agree to abandon it.

Your committee are of opinion, that the premises now occupied by the Institution will afford sufficient accommodation for as many as will probably be committed to our care ; and it is believed that this may be done without any essential change in the government or discipline of the house or in the general administration of its affairs, and that the most perfect and unconditional separation may be preserved between the inmates of the different departments ; and **OUR REPORT IS FOUNDED ON THE ASSUMPTION, THAT THIS TOTAL AND INVARIABLE SEPARATION IS PRACTICABLE AND WILL BE FULLY SECURED.**

To accomplish the end it is proposed to erect a new building which shall extend from a line nearly coincident with the west wall of the chapel to the eastern wall of the yard and to be three stories in height. The third story to be occupied by coloured girls, and to be accessible at the east end of the house only—and to be lighted by sky-lights or by openings upon the north side looking into the girls' yard—the south side of the third story to be a blank wall, and the floor of this story to extend over the whole width of the building.

The second and first stories will be occupied by coloured boys—will be accessible from the west end and will be lighted upon the south side—the north wall of these stories being blank—the school room, work-shops and other apartments for the accom-

modation of this class of children and the proposed provision for their separation are seen upon the plan (and description thereto annexed) on the table of the Board.—The main building is designed to contain 25 dormitories in each story—so as to accommodate 25 girls and 50 boys.

The expense of these buildings with the necessary fixtures, furniture and conveniences, according to the best estimate we have been able to obtain, will not exceed \$11,000, and it is hoped that the friends of the neglected and unhappy children, whose interests are involved, will readily furnish this amount to provide for them a permanent place of useful instruction and wholesome discipline.

It is obvious that such an increase of inmates will add materially to the annual expenses of the house, perhaps from \$3,000 to 4,000. As our expenses with our present number nearly absorb and have sometimes exceeded our means, it must be highly improvident to increase them, unless our resources are enlarged in a corresponding ratio.—For this supply reliance must be placed on the liberality of the Legislature which the institution has already experienced, and it is hardly to be doubted that they will regard with favour so valuable an extension of the benefits of the Refuge as the contemplated department promises.

It certainly will be an important gain to the Commonwealth, should the means of rescuing from igno-



rance and vice scores of the neglected and degraded children of our coloured population, be provided by private bounty; and the allowance of a few thousand dollars a year for the current expenses of their support must be considered as a small return for so great a boon conferred or rather for so great evils prevented. The question is supposed to lie between the proposition in substance now suggested to the Board and no provision at all for coloured delinquents. It is highly improbable that sufficient funds can be raised to purchase a suitable site and erect buildings and make provision for a separate coloured Refuge—and if, in this alternative, we can, at a comparatively insignificant expense, avail ourselves of a site already possessed, and so enlarge the arrangements of police, instruction and guardianship already established, as to extend their beneficial influence to the most wretched and abandoned of our juvenile population, and all this without any compromise of the interests of the house as it stands, who will not cordially approve and efficiently aid in the enterprise?

The Board have directed the Committee to inquire and report as to the comparative cost of the proposed enlargement and an entirely new site and buildings; but we can only say—that we know not why a new site and new buildings would not cost nearly as much as the present House of Refuge, if built of similar materials, of like size, and on equally valuable land. What might be saved in either of these

respects must, of course, depend on circumstances not within our knowledge.

With these views the Committee submit the following resolutions to the consideration of the Board.

1. That the unoccupied grounds, now appurtenant to the House of Refuge, afford sufficient room for building and yards to accommodate from 60 to 80 coloured children, and that such buildings can, in their opinion, be so located, arranged and superintended as to secure a perfect separation of the occupants from the other inmates of the House.

2. That whenever the Board shall be furnished with the means of erecting and furnishing such buildings they will erect and furnish the same, and will then receive coloured children under their care and guardianship—provided the Legislature will enlarge their annual appropriation in proportion to the increase which the new department will occasion in our annual expenses.

3. That the proposed measure be commended to the consideration and liberality of our fellow citizens as highly conducive to the peace, order and general welfare of the community.

FREDERICK A. PACKARD,  
ELIJAH DALLETT,  
PHILIP GARRETT,  
HENRY TROTH,  
THOMAS EARP,  
STEPHEN COLWELL,  
ISAAC COLLINS.

*Philadelphia, March 1, 1841.*





